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THE ECCLESIASTICAL POLICY OF FRANCISCO MORAZÁN AND THE OTHER CENTRAL AMERICAN LIBERALS

The daring slogan of Voltaire, "*Écrasez l'infâme*," raised against the parasitic, privileged orthodoxy of his age, well illustrates the truism that uttered words are like a pebble thrown into a pond in that they set in motion an endless succession of thought ripples which may ultimately touch the outermost margin of human life; for, though many of the Central American reformers were doubtless unconscious of the fact, the teachings of the French philosopher were at the foundation of the ecclesiastical policy of Francisco Morazán and the political group of which, for ten years, he was leader. This influence becomes very obvious after a brief study of the relation between state and church on the Isthmus from the inception of the idea of political independence to the time when Morazán grasped the reins of political control.

Spanish intellectuals were stimulated by the writings of Voltaire and other French radicals long before the soldiers of Napoleon Bonaparte entered the Iberian Peninsula, but the first important fruits of this influence did not appear until after the meeting of the Cortes of Cadiz, which had organized to defy the Bonapartes and to destroy their dominion to the south of the Pyrenees. The Cortes, made up primarily of radicals, imitating the French National Assembly, quickly enacted a body of startlingly democratic laws, which not only struck a blow at the

nobility but also stripped the Spanish clergy of a large portion of their special privileges and time-honored prerogatives.

This latter fact caused a profound change among the churchmen of the Captaincy-General of Guatemala. A few years before, the church had been the most dependable as well as the most powerful part of the Spanish machinery for the administration of the Indies; the clergy, always loyal themselves, could be counted upon to inculcate in the minds of their spiritual charges the duty of faithfulness and of submission to the Catholic sovereigns. Now, many of the Isthmian clergy, fearful lest they, in turn, be shorn of their ancient power and rich endowments, if they remained linked politically with Spain, joined the other revolutionists in the hope of becoming the dominant element in an oligarchy to be established under an independent flag.¹ It is true, the restoration of the degenerate and craven House of Bourbon to the Spanish throne, followed by the reactionary measures of Ferdinand VII., was reflected in Guatemala by a slight counter-revolutionary movement—especially among the higher clergy and the friars;² but this shifting was not of sufficient importance to delay for long the winning of independence.

Scarcely was freedom from the motherland a reality, however, before it was evident that special privilege in Central America was again jeopardized by the French revolutionary philosophy, which had trickled into the Indies in spite of the strict censorship of Spain; for the Liberals, made up largely of middle-class creoles, showed unexpected numbers and aggressiveness. These men, many of whom had read Voltaire and other kindred writers with avidity, had led in the movement for independence, and now gave promise of ruining the plans of the Conservatives—or Serviles, as they are most commonly called—with whom the clergy had allied themselves, by the establishment of a government upon a democratic basis. Largely in the hope of yet gaining their ends, the would-be oligarchs eagerly welcomed a union with Mexico

¹ E. G. Squier. *Nicaragua*, II. 373-374, 378; H. H. Bancroft, *Central America*, III. 12, 18, 34, 38, 43.

² Bancroft, *Central America*, III. 38, 40.

under Iturbide, whom the clerical wing of the group seemed especially to hail as a savior from the perils that faced them. But before the varied political units which had composed the old Captaincy-General of Guatemala could—by voluntary submission or by military coercion—be brought under the Mexican flag, Iturbide's wobbly throne collapsed and his dream of empire was no more.³

The people of the Isthmus, again free to follow their own political inclinations, through a national constituent assembly soon proclaimed themselves an independent nation under the name the United Provinces of Central America. Liberal ideas prevailed in the Assembly, and the hope for a centralized oligarchical government which would make impregnable the position of special privilege was once more defeated. The constitution, proclaimed in 1824, provided for a federal republic; and the large number of legislative decrees promptly passed by the Liberals displayed a grim determination to exalt the lowly and to abase those who sat in the seats of the mighty. Human slavery was abolished, and likewise the recently self-created nobility; even titles of special respect, such as "Don", were outlawed; monopolies and other economic discriminations were swept aside; a modern system of justice was introduced; freedom of the press was proclaimed; and plans were laid for the introduction of free public schools on the model of those at the time being tried out in the United States.⁴

The Liberals, however, in their zeal for reform and progress, forgot that the Central Americans, largely of aboriginal descent, must learn to creep before they could walk. Some of the above-mentioned legislation and much of that subsequently enacted was of too radical a character for the masses of the nation, who inclined to oppose it because it was new and incomprehensible. Opposition to this leveling legislation on the part of the lay-aristocrats was a foregone conclusion; and the clergy also set

³ Squier, *Nicaragua*, II. 379-384; Bancroft, *Central America*, III. 38, 55, 56, 66.

⁴ Alejandro Marure, *Bosquejo Histórico de las Revoluciones de Centro-América, desde 1811 hasta 1834*, I. 244-246; Squier, *Nicaragua*, II. 384-385; Bancroft, *Central America*, III. 628.

themselves against the democratic laws as a whole, partly because of the natural conservatism of the Church, partly because of previous fractional alignment with the aristocratic Serviles; and they displayed a special antipathy towards the plans for general intellectual enlightenment,⁵ since the most loyal followers of the clergy were the densely ignorant aborigines and mestizos. Education under public supervision was certain to decimate the numbers of these faithful. Such considerations led the Church to ally itself more firmly than before with the other conservatives in the population, and to display an increased unfriendliness towards the party in power.

This inimical attitude towards the Liberals was many times multiplied in consequence of decrees aimed directly at the Church. For, though the constitution made Roman Catholicism the state religion, to the exclusion of public observance of any other, it was evident at the outset that the ecclesiastical was to be made subordinate to the civil, and that the clergy must part with many—if not all—of their ancient prerogatives. Even before the Federal constitution was completed, the undermining process was inaugurated, by decrees of the Constituent Assembly, later followed up by enactments of the regular government. Certain of the early edicts much reduced the foreign support of the Church: the Inquisition, which had ceased to function with the collapse of the Spanish colonial machinery, was abolished; no papal bull might be promulgated without previous approval by the central government; and no local heads of religious orders were permitted to recognize obedience to, or hold relations with, their superiors in Spain. The stream of clerical recruits was greatly attenuated by a decree forbidding admission of persons under twenty-three years of age to monasteries and nunneries, and those under twenty-five, to profession; and the Church was enfeebled on its administrative side through a requirement that the archbishop make no appointment of parish priests without first securing governmental sanction of his choice. Other legislation of an economic nature was equally disastrous: the privilege, long enjoyed by the clergy, of having goods im-

⁵ Henry Dunn, *Guatemala*, pp. 104, 136.

ported free of duty was canceled; the amount of tithes which they might collect was reduced by fifty per cent; and a comprehensive inheritance law gave the children of priests and nuns the right to inherit like the off-spring of laymen—thus creating a continuous leakage of wealth from the ecclesiastical organization.⁶

The apparent result of all of this legislation was the curtailment of ecclesiastical power, but the immediate reasons for the different enactments varied. Some laws were intended to protect the state from clergy—including Archbishop Ramón Casaus and certain members of the monastic orders—who were under suspicion because they had opposed independence from Spain, and had, in some cases, to be coerced into taking the oath of allegiance to the Federal constitution; others aimed to help recoup the public treasury, and at the same time sweep away aristocratic privilege; while still other legislation—especially that of later date—was enacted for the punishment of opposition to earlier acts and of intrigues against the government. These punitive measures, in particular, resulted in increased hostility on the part of the Church, which displayed itself in greater opposition and more comprehensive intrigue; and this, in turn, produced more severe legislation. Thus was created a “vicious circle”, which, as time passed, increased in power and in dangerous possibilities for the Central American Confederation.

In this connection there should be mentioned one further influence affecting the relations of the governing faction and the Church. Though there were certain very laudable exceptions, both in character and in general ecclesiastical practices, the clergy of Central America left much to be desired; neither by precept nor by example did they teach pure religion and undefiled.⁷ This fact gave an excellent handle to the Liberals, who—some moved merely by atheistic impatience,⁸ and others, by the

⁶ Marure, *Bosquejo Histórico*, I. 244-246; Henry Charles Lea, *The Inquisition in the Spanish Dependencies*, pp. 297-298.

⁷ See the following: Dunn, *Guatemala*; Robert Glasgow Dunlop, *Travels in Central America*; Frederick Crowe, *The Gospel in Central America*; Squier, *Nicaragua*.

⁸ Dunn, *Guatemala*, p. 92; Crowe, *Gospel in Central America*, pp. 123, 256-257.

conviction that the power of the Church was a menace to republican government—proceeded to expose the moral weaknesses of the priests and friars and to poke fun at the practices by which they fooled the superstitious, and aimed to dominate the minds of all. Stories and anecdotes with this in view were freely circulated by word of mouth;⁹ but the public press and the theatre were also used¹⁰—the latter especially to eliminate the desire expressed by some for the restoration of the Inquisition.¹¹

Though these methods detached some of the more intelligent supporters of the Church, and even spread infidelity among the clergy, their chief effect was to widen the fast growing chasm between the Church and the Liberals and to increase to an intense degree the hatred felt for their enemies by the clergy and their remaining faithful.

The character and the disparity of interests and aims shown by the Federal executive and the provincial officials of Guatemala greatly aggravated the situation and encouraged clerico-aristocratic intrigue. Juan Barrundia and Cirilo Flores, jefe and vice-jefe of Guatemala province, were extreme radicals, and, as such, were relentless towards the Church.¹² The first Federal president was Manuel José Arce, who, in an election of rather dubious legality, had triumphed over his rival, José del Valle.¹³ Arce, who appears to have been a man of little character and no great ability, was nominally a Liberal and primarily a selfish politician. In this effort to make his position secure, he tried to please both political factions; and, thus, he offended his original supporters. The Conservatives, aided and encouraged by the clergy, did their utmost to add to the discord

⁹ Dunlop, *Central America*, p. 342; Bancroft, *Central America*, III. 628.

¹⁰ Dunn, *Guatemala*, p. 119; Lea, *Inquisition in the Spanish Dependencies*, pp. 298-299; Squier, *Nicaragua*, I. 372.

¹¹ "A play called 'La Inquisition por dentro,' or 'A Peep into the Inquisition,' had a great run and brought that institution into effectual and lasting odium." Squier, *Nicaragua*, I. 372.

¹² Bancroft, *Central America*, III. 146.

¹³ Dunn, *Guatemala*, p. 188.

within the ranks of the Liberals, in general, and between the Federal and provincial authorities, in particular. Soon the atmosphere of suspicion and intrigue produced a virtual deadlock in the Federal administration, which tempted Arce to resort to unconstitutional and violent measures. A conflict between the discordant elements within the province of Guatemala was thus imminent; but before it began, a storm which had long been brewing broke in another quarter. This was due to a quarrel between the Archbishop and the civil and ecclesiastical authorities of Salvador.

Though, in importance in the Federation, Salvador ranked next to Guatemala, she had no bishop of her own but was under the direct ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the latter state. Honduras and Nicaragua, on the other hand, possessed independent episcopal organizations. The seeming discrimination, though probably due to Salvador's comparatively late political organization, her smaller area, and her proximity and accessibility to Guatemala, had long been resented by the Salvadoreans, who, more than a decade before Central American independence, began a struggle for the erection of the province into a separate diocese.¹⁴ When the wars against Spain began, nothing had been definitely accomplished towards the realization of her ambitions, and, consequently, Salvador decided to act on her own initiative. Her determination to do so was largely caused by the influence of a Salvadorean priest, Matías Delgado¹⁵—who in his aspirations to wear the miter himself, had the support of the more worldly and less orthodox of the local clergy¹⁶—and by the fact that the Salvadoreans—among whom the Liberal element was particularly strong—had opposed union with Mexico, and had felt themselves betrayed by the Guatemalan

¹⁴ Marure, *Bosquejo Histórico*, I. 129; J. Haefkens, *Centraal Amerika*, p. 120.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ "El clero se dividió en opiniones: pocos eclesiásticos respetables por sus virtudes y su conducta siguieron la causa de Delgado; pero encontraron apoyo en ella todos los que por la inmoralidad y los vicios, las resentimientos y las aspiraciones, estaban mal en el concepto del metropolitano."—Manuel Montúfar, *Memorias para la Historia de la Revolución de Centro-América*, p. 34.

aristocrats who favored it.¹⁷ Accordingly, taking advantage of the confusion caused by the struggle for independence, the revolutionary junta of Salvador, in 1822, erected a separate see and appointed Delgado to the office. The Constituent Assembly of the province confirmed the action two years later, and formally notified the Federal government that it had done so. It also apprised the Pope of the appointment, "in order that he might make out the necessary bulls".¹⁸ Neither Pope nor Archbishop had been consulted before this final action; but the latter promptly protested after learning of it—not, he asserted, against the creation of a separate diocese, but against the illegality of the procedure;¹⁹ and later the Pontiff threatened Salvador with excommunication and called upon Delgado to repent.²⁰ The Federal Congress, jealous of the assumption of power, and conscious of the rights of the Pope, refused to approve the action of Salvador;²¹ but the authorities of that state solemnly installed Delgado in April, 1825; and in defiance of high powers, civil and ecclesiastical, he occupied the recently constructed episcopal chair until 1829, when the Salvadoreans themselves turned against him.²²

The first result of this clash of ecclesiastical authority was a controversy between various churchmen of the Republic, led by the Archbishop. From involved arguments in which copious quotations from the Scriptures and from the Church Fathers figured largely on both sides,²³ the contestants quickly descended to a fierce paper warfare; denunciation was countered with denunciation, and anathema, with anathema.²⁴ As was inevitable, the church fell further in the respect of the intelligent part of

¹⁷ Dunn, *Guatemala*, p. 179. In the hope of saving herself from incorporation with Mexico, Salvador passed a solemn act, December 2, 1822, decreeing her union with the United States. The government at Washington appears to have paid no attention to the compliment (see Squier, *Nicaragua*, II. 383-384).

¹⁸ Marure, *Bosquejo Histórico*, I. 129-130; Haefkens, *Centraal Amerika*, 120.

¹⁹ Haefkens, *Centraal Amerika*, p. 121.

²⁰ Marure, *Bosquejo Histórico*, I. 134.

²¹ Haefkens, *Centraal Amerika*, pp. 123, 124.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 124; Montúfar, *Memorias*, p. 36.

²³ Haefkens, *Centraal Amerika*, pp. 121-122; Dunn, *Guatemala*, pp. 117-118.

²⁴ Dunn, *Guatemala*, pp. 118-119.

the population, and it lost almost the last vestige of power for good that it had possessed among the influential part of the nation. In Salvador, in particular, which had already been profoundly influenced by the free thought of the French philosophers, infidelity grew to a degree that alarmed the more serious among the clergy, some of whom took measures designed to counteract it.²⁵

This quarrel was one of the causes of the trouble between President Arce and his congress, for the leaders of the malcontents were the members from Salvador. The Liberals of the two provinces were divided by it, and thus were further aided the intrigues with which the opposition now busied itself, led by the clergy, who could point to the atheism of Salvador and the disrespect for religion shown by its officials, as well as by the jefe and the vice-jefe of Guatemala, to prove that the Liberal party was the enemy of religion and aimed to destroy the people's means of salvation.²⁶

Meanwhile, the intrigues of the Serviles—and perhaps his own natural interests—brought Arce closer to the latter,²⁷ while his high-handed and unconstitutional procedure widened the gulf between himself and the Liberals. Then came the act which perhaps did more than anything else to precipitate the civil conflict, which the ecclesiastical schism had made virtually inevitable.²⁸ This was Arce's arrest of Barrundia, the radical jefe of Guatemala, upon the charge that he was planning a *coup de main*. Whether the accusation was well founded it is impossible to say; for while it is very evident that many Liberals, like Barrundia, would have been glad to remove Arce from

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 119. "San Salvador, at present in a state of complete anarchy, sends forth a weekly newspaper in which the authority of the pope, the celibacy of the clergy, and monastic institutions are openly ridiculed, and quotations from Voltaire striking at the root of all religion are constantly inserted" (*ibid.*). "In America there is none of the majestic solemnity attached to the Roman Catholic religion, which is found in some of the countries of continental Europe" (Dunlop, *Central America*, p. 343).

²⁶ Montúfar, *Memorias*, pp. 32-36, *passim*.

²⁷ Dunn, *Guatemala*, p. 202.

²⁸ Alejandro Marure, *Efemérides de los hechos notables acaecidos en la República de Centro-América, desde el año de 1821 hasta el de 1842*, pp. 35-36.

power, it is equally patent that the Serviles of Guatemala—especially the clerical element among them—desired to be rid of Barrundia. Furthermore, there is no doubt that at this stage plotting and scheming were rife on both sides.

Hostilities began almost immediately, with the Archbishop and Arce supporting the Serviles and del Valle on the side of the Liberals. Much of the strength of the latter came from the Salvadoreans, at first led by Bishop Delgado—who appears to have been more of a politician than a pastor—with whom the disaffected elements in Honduras and Guatemala allied themselves.²⁹ For more than two years Central America rocked and swayed under warfare as violent and destructive as a tropical storm. To the complexities and horrors of strife involving the Confederation as a whole were added those resulting from revolutions and civil conflicts within the provinces themselves. In many cases, it is impossible to determine either motives or sequence in the welter of events, but one fact stands out clearly through it all: that, except for the Salvadorean clerical adherents of Delgado, the clergy and their ignorant faithful fought desperately against the Liberals. Unspeakable atrocities were committed by both sides, but none was worse than the massacre of Vice-Jefe Flores in a church to which he had fled for sanctuary—a deed inspired by the preaching of a fanatical friar.³⁰

As the conflict proceeded, Francisco Morazán gradually came to the front as military leader of the Liberal forces, and through his superior generalship, Guatemala City was captured and the Serviles were crushed. Following this, Morazán was first made dictator, and then president, of the Republic; and in these capacities he shaped the policy of the Liberals as long as they remained dominant in the government.

²⁹ Dana G. Munro, *Central America*, p. 29.

³⁰ The special cause for hostility towards Flores was that in the general levy of taxes for state purposes, he had not spared the property of the Church. When the news of Barrundia's arrest arrived, "a friar ascended the pulpit, in the principal town, on a market-day, and by his harangue so infuriated the populace against Flores, that they started in pursuit of him, and although he sought sanctuary in the church, they followed him thither, and slaughtered him at the very foot of the altar, literally rending his body in pieces, amidst cries of "Long live Guatemala! Death to the Republic!" (Squier, *Nicaragua*, II. 396).

In view of the fact that the victors early evinced a determination to deal severely with Arce and the other non-clerical leaders of the Serviles, it would seem a foregone conclusion that the churchmen, and especially the Archbishop, would share in the punishment; for the Liberals well knew that Casaús had voted against separation from Spain,³¹ that since the establishment of independence he had used his influence against them, especially during the conflict just ended,³² and that he was opposed to the reforms—particularly those in the interests of general education—which the new government was determined to push.³³ Furthermore, it hardly seems possible that Morazán could have seriously believed that the Archbishop would even remain neutral under the existing régime, to say nothing of showing active loyalty to the party in power. Nevertheless, the victorious Liberal appears to have decided to give Casaús a fair trial, perhaps largely because he doubted his ability to cope with the situation that might be created by the latter's expulsion. Probably likewise from motives of policy, he even showed a desire to conciliate the Church party as a whole—which expected the atheistic Liberals to show a contempt for all religion—by being very punctilious about having the soldiers attend divine service.³⁴

Shortly after coming to the head of the government, Morazán had a frank talk with the Archbishop and tried to come to an understanding with him. During this conversation Casaús appears to have expressed a willingness to acquiesce in the existing state of affairs and to coöperate with the government in its efforts to restore order and to stabilize the administration.³⁵ And at this time he must have realized—what had been true

³¹ G. A. Thompson, *Narrative of an Official Visit to Guatemala*, 142; MS., by F. Morazán, *Apuntes de las revoluciones de '29*, p. 2; Marure, *Bosquejo Histórico*, I. 130.

³² "Dictamen de la comisión especial nombrada por la Asamblea Legislativa del Estado del Salvador," Oct. 18, 1826, which is found in the appendix to Manuel José Arce's *Memoria*.

³³ Dunn, *Guatemala*, 104, 136; Thompson, *Narrative*, 338.

³⁴ Haefkens. *Centraal Amerika*, p. 269.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 270.

before the civil wars—that he would have very little independent power, but must make appointments in harmony with the wishes of the government.

This done, Morazán proceeded. The Federal government was virtually bankrupt, and therefore Congress decreed that some of the silver should be taken from the churches and coined into money. A requisition for this purpose was accordingly presented to the Archbishop, who apparently gave the necessary orders without hesitation.³⁶ Morazán then instructed Casaus to remove certain church officials and a considerable number of priests, who were objectionable because of their enmity towards the government, and to appoint other specified ones to their places.³⁷ To some of the proposed appointments the Archbishop objected, on the basis of the men's religious views, or their characters,³⁸ or the fact that they had become his enemies in the strife over the Bishopric of Salvador; but under pressure from the government he finally made the required changes.³⁹ In doing so, however, he threw the blame for them upon Morazán—where it obviously belonged—and made evident his own helpless disapprovals by wording as follows the notifications sent

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 234.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 269; Montúfar, *Memorias*, p. 169.

³⁸ "Durante la omnipotencia de Morazán en Guatemala, y antes la reunión del congreso, dominó tambien al arzobispo D. Fr. Ramón Casaus: le obligó por el terror y por las intrigas y sugestiones, á nombrar para provisor del arzobispado al Dr. D. José Antonio Alcayaga, y para gobernador eclesiástico del obispado de Honduras . . . al presbítero D. Francisco Márquez, de cuyas opiniones religiosas no estaba satisfecho el arzobispo, como no estaba de las del Dr. Alcayaga con respecto á las que había emitido sobre la erección de la silla episcopal en San Salvador. Morazán obligó tambien al arzobispo á variar casi todos los párrocos que egercían con título de propiedad en el estado de Guatemala, y designó los que quería para subrogar á los depuestos ó separados: entre los que se nombraron había una porción de eclesiásticos cuya conducta moral era en lo privado y en lo público reprehensible y escandalosa." (Montúfar, *Memorias*, pp. 169-170).

The charges against the religious views and the morals of the clergy of Morazán's choice probably had considerable foundation; for the churchmen who favored the Liberal cause were much influenced by the teachings of the French philosophers, and laxity of morals was likely to increase among the clergy in proportion as infidelity grew.

³⁹ Montúfar, *Memorias*, p. 170.

to the new appointees: "The General has demanded the deposition of — and appointed you in his place."⁴⁰

Realizing the probable effect of such a communication upon the clergy as a whole and upon their adherents, Morazán was very indignant when he heard what Casaus had done, and wrote him an angry letter, in which he indicated that he thought that the tactics used were intended to precipitate an uprising.

"Most Reverend Archbishop," he proceeded, "the form of your notification is alarming, and a personal insult to me. Your conduct is in glaring contradiction of the principles of prudence and moderation which would be in order, and completely at variance with the sentiments you displayed in our private discussions. . . . I have still the sword in my hand, my victorious army is ready to execute my commands; I maintain the rights of the people and defend the laws; and I am firmly determined to remove by the power of arms all the obstacles which might oppose the establishment of order and law, wherever moderation and courtesy prove without avail."⁴¹

Some authorities are of the opinion that this letter was not dispatched to the Archbishop, but that one of milder tone was substituted.⁴² Whether or not this was the case is of little importance to the question. The really significant fact is the character of the document, for it discloses Morazán's attitude, and makes it evident that if he had not already decided to lay violent hands upon Casaus it would take very little more to persuade him to do so. There is no available evidence that further communications passed between the two men.

Not long after Morazán had written the sharp criticism of the Archbishop, and but two days following the proscription by the Federal Congress of a number of lay members of the defeated Serviles, Morazán, who had been recently invested with extraordinary powers, gave orders for the expulsion of Casaus and a

⁴⁰ Translated from Haefkens, *Centraal Amerika*, p. 269. J. Haefkens was consul-general for the Netherlands in Central America during the period in question, and his testimony is of much value, as coming from an unbiased outsider.

⁴¹ Translated from Haefkens, *Centraal Amerika*, pp. 269-270.

⁴² Haefkens, *Centraal Amerika*, p. 270.

large portion of the members of the Franciscan, Dominican, and Recollect orders of Guatemala City.⁴³ The discovery of a conspiracy against the government in which the Prelate and the friars were involved was given as the reason for the action.⁴⁴ Several civil or military officials, likewise accused of implication in the alleged plot, were at the same time arrested and thrown into prison.⁴⁵

That many of the priests and friars had previously opposed, and plotted against, the Liberals, and that they were living in the hope that Central America might soon be brought again under Spanish rule and their ancient privileges be restored,⁴⁶ was common knowledge, but whether either they or the Archbishop were guilty of a specific plot against the government at the time of their arrest is somewhat doubtful; for it seems as if more details would be available if a definite conspiracy had been laid bare. The charge may have been published by the government simply with a view to justifying its contemplated action in the eyes of the nation—a theory which gains considerable support from the fact that the officials who were arrested as fellow conspirators were quietly released shortly after the accused clergy had been removed from the city.⁴⁷

It should be emphasized, however, that the primary reason for the expatriation of the friars was the belief that they were a menace to the government, and, hence, to the Republic, and not, as some writers have implied, the mere desire for an excuse to profit by their wealth. Yet it is not necessary to assume that Morazán and his associates were unmindful of the fact that the orders—especially that of St. Dominic⁴⁸—were reported to possess much wealth, which might come in handy in helping fill the depleted coffers of the nation, and in feeding and paying

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 271; Montúfar, *Memorias*, p. 170; Marure, *Efemérides*, p. 25.

⁴⁴ Haefkens, *Centraal Amerika*, p. 272; Dunlop, *Central America*, p. 177; Squier, *Nicaragua*, II. 408.

⁴⁵ Haefkens, *Centraal Amerika*, p. 272.

⁴⁶ Baneroff, *Central America*, III. 146; Dunn, *Guatemala*, p. 116.

⁴⁷ Haefkens, *Centraal Amerika*, p. 272.

⁴⁸ Thompson, *Narrative*, p. 146.

the army, the maintenance of which was essential to Liberal control.⁴⁹

The arrests were made on the night of July 10, 1829. The servants of the Archbishop were temporarily imprisoned in one of the rooms of the latter's palace and guarded by soldiers, and Casaus was given notice to prepare for his departure. After he had gathered some of his possessions and made other arrangements, the Prelate was placed in a chair and carried away from the palace, well escorted by troops.⁵⁰ A little later, his journey out of the country began. Notwithstanding the charges of anti-Liberal writers,⁵¹ considerable pains seem to have been taken to treat the Archbishop as became his rank. Transportation facilities were so poor as to make it necessary that he ride to the coast; but two hundred and eighteen pesos, as the accounts indicate, were paid for a mule and its equipment for his accommodation, pages to accompany him and take care of his effects cost something over a thousand more, and two thousand pesos were allowed for the further expenses of his journey.⁵²

For most of the distance to the coast the Archbishop and the friars traveled in company, the route being from Guatemala City to the Gulf of Dulce, next, to Gualan, and then to Omoa,

⁴⁹ "The army, which contained about eighteen hundred men—including a very disproportionate number of officers—had in the beginning used about sixty thousand dollars per month for its support; now, the soldiers were in want, notwithstanding the fact that the desertions, at which the superior officers connived, had thinned the ranks. There were already some instances of soldiers who, in order to subdue the pangs of hunger, had eaten wild fruits—especially the luscious, cooling fruit of the cactus—and had succumbed to the distemper brought about by this improper diet. The resources were exhausted and there was a feeling against resorting to open violence and exaction. The State of Guatemala, which, so far, had footed the bills, had already announced that it was no longer able to do so; the other states, instead of volunteering contributions, clamored for indemnifications. Under these circumstances, it is not too much to assume that the booty expected from the monasteries may have contributed a partial motive." (Translated from Haefkens, *Centraal Amerika*, pp. 273-274.)

⁵⁰ Montúfar, *Memorias*, p. 170; Manuel José Arce, *Memoria*, p. 123.

⁵¹ Montúfar, *Memorias*, p. 170.

⁵² Bancroft, *Central America*, III. 103-104; Lorenzo Montúfar, *Reseña Histórica de Centro-América*, I. 157. "Una persona que lleva todo esto no puede decir que carece de provisiones. San Pedro no habría necesitado tanto". (Montúfar, *Reseña Histórica*, I. 157.)

where ship was taken.⁵³ Casaus, evidently through preference, went to Havana, where the Spanish authorities received him well. A short time after his arrival he was voted a pension of three thousand pesos by the Spanish government,⁵⁴ and subsequently he was appointed to the see of Havana, which he occupied until his death, in 1845.⁵⁵

Presumably, stimulated by the fact of Casaus having accepted bounty at the hands of the repudiated motherland, in June, 1830, the Congress of Central America declared the Archbishop a traitor, confiscated his property, and passed against him a formal sentence of expatriation.⁵⁶

On the night on which the Archbishop was apprehended the troops of Morazán also took captive a large number of the members of the Franciscan, Dominican, and Recollect orders living in the capital.⁵⁷ After their houses had been surrounded by soldiers, the brethren were assembled in response to roll-call,⁵⁸ and were commanded to mount at once the horses and mules that stood ready in the courtyards. Ignorant of what awaited them, but fearing the worst, the friars obeyed and were promptly taken under military guard to the Gulf of Dulce, where they were soon joined by the Archbishop, after which the whole group of prisoners proceeded to the coast and were put aboard two vessels which were about ready for departure.⁵⁹ Both ships appear to have gone first to Havana, where most of the friars

⁵³ Arce, *Memoria*, p. 123; Haefkens, *Centraal Amerika*, p. 271.

⁵⁴ Montúfar, *Memorias*, p. 171.

⁵⁵ Marure, *Efemérides*, pp. 61-62. After the Serviles gained control in Central America, Casaus was repeatedly invited to return, but he never did (Bancroft, *Central America*, III. 104).

⁵⁶ Montúfar, *Memorias*, p. 171; Crowe, *Gospel in Central America*, p. 131.

⁵⁷ Marure, *Efemérides*, p. 25; Montúfar, *Memorias*, p. 170.

⁵⁸ Haefkens, *Centraal Amerika*, p. 271. According to Thompson (*Narrative*, p. 191) there were in Guatemala City, in 1825, about one hundred and twenty friars, all told, who belonged to these three orders. Haefkens says (*Centraal Amerika*, p. 271) that about sixty were banished. Just how much effort was made to distinguish the innocent from the guilty is not apparent, but it is quite evident that all of the members of the three orders were not sent out of the country when the Archbishop was banished. (See G. F. von Tempsky, *Milla*, p. 372.)

⁵⁹ Montúfar, *Memorias*, p. 170; Haefkens, *Centraal Amerika*, p. 271.

disembarked with Archbishop Casaus, but a number of them continued to New Orleans in the United States packet *Albany*.⁶⁰

Some of the friars, especially those of advanced age, died during the voyage, and others, after they had reached their destinations.⁶¹ This unhappy fact was made much of by the enemies of the Liberal cause;⁶² but there seems to be no doubt that the prisoners were treated about as well as conditions permitted. The hardships they suffered were the result of circumstances rather than of any aim to insult and persecute them. A heavy rain was falling when they departed from Guatemala City, and, for some reason that is not clear, the friars had to walk for the first three miles.⁶³ The exposure to the weather was doubtless very hard on the aged, and also the mental strain; for many of the prisoners believed when they were arrested that they were about to be put to death.⁶⁴ But they were soon assured that they were in no such danger, and were supplied with mounts for practically the whole journey to the port of Omoa. They were, moreover, given time to rest and recuperate at Gualan.⁶⁵ Their food aboard ship was coarse and simple, and the water with which they were furnished was bad; but, as regards both food and drink, they fared no worse than did the sailors.⁶⁶ There was this difference, however: the mariners were accustomed to such treatment, while the friars were not. It should be borne in mind, also, that the voyage was long and rough; for the passage between Honduras and Havana alone consumed sixteen days; and it took fifty-two before the exiles bound for New Orleans reached their destination.⁶⁷

Furthermore, the future needs of the banished friars were not entirely disregarded, for the Federal government voted that they be paid a pension of one hundred and fifty pesos, the money to

⁶⁰ Arce, *Memoria*, p. 123.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

⁶² *Ibid.*; Montúfar, *Memorias*, p. 170.

⁶³ Arce, *Memoria*, p. 123.

⁶⁴ Haefkens, *Centraal Amerika*, III. 271.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ Arce, *Memoria*, p. 124.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

be secured from the property of the orders, which the republic had promptly confiscated.⁶⁸

The most valuable possession of the friars was the landed property, which the government tried to sell, but as few buyers appeared, the estates were for the most part disposed of under lease contracts.⁶⁹ Both as regards the amount of treasure found in the houses of the friars and the disposal of it, the writers of the time fail to agree. Haefkens is of the opinion that this part of the booty did not come up to expectations,⁷⁰ while Manuel Montúfar says that it exceeded them.⁷¹ Arce seems to agree with the latter;⁷² and it is probable that these two Central Americans knew whereof they spoke. According to Montúfar, the government stipulated that the sacred vessels and other ecclesiastical furnishings of value and fine workmanship should be given to the cathedral, that other articles should be distributed among the poor parishes, and that the remainder of the gold and silver objects should be melted down and coined into money.⁷³ He declares, however, that the plan largely failed of execution, and that in the end only a few individuals benefited from the confiscation of the treasure.⁷⁴ One of the newspapers of the time accused the populace and the soldiers of looting the monasteries, but both Arce and Montúfar discredit this statement,⁷⁵ and the latter indicates that those who profited were the wealthier classes and the leaders. Large amounts of the valuables, Montúfar says, reached Chiapas and the British settlements in Belize, and were used in the latter place in the payment of mercantile bills of one sort or another. And it was reported, according to the same writer, that after the plate reached the mint some of it was appropriated by an official, in lieu of salary due

⁶⁸ Haefkens, *Centraal Amerika*, p. 276.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 274.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Montúfar, *Memorias*, p. 175.

⁷² Arce, *Memoria*, p. 123.

⁷³ Montúfar, *Memorias*, p. 175.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 174; Arce, *Memoria*, p. 123.

him; and it was even hinted that some of the pieces of treasure became the private possessions of Morazán himself.⁷⁶

It seems impossible to determine the exact truth of the matter; but no person familiar with the frailties of human nature in general and with the corruptibility of public officials in particular will for a minute assume that a miracle was wrought in the case in question, and that the treasure was disposed of exactly as decreed—or even that the government intended that it should be.

Though Morazán gave the orders for the expulsion of the friars, they were issued in entire accordance with the views of the acting president of the Republic and of the new jefe of Guatemala; and after the banishment had taken place, the Federal Congress formally thanked the Commander-in-Chief for the zeal that he had displayed in the matter.⁷⁷ In fact, from this time on, there appears to have been general agreement among the Liberal leaders in the provinces and the central government that the Church in all of its branches should be placed beyond the possibility of harming the Liberal cause. In harmony with this idea, about two weeks after the religious orders had been banished, the Legislative Assembly of Guatemala passed a decree for the suppression of monastic establishments of men throughout the province", as inconsistent with republican freedom and equality, and on account of the hostility of the majority of their members against the new institutions".⁷⁸ The one exception made was the Bethlehemite hospitallers, who had busied themselves in teaching and caring for the sick, and had escaped suspicion. They were permitted to remain as secular priests.⁷⁹ All the property of the suppressed establishments was confiscated by the State.⁸⁰ The same decree encouraged nuns to

⁷⁶ . . . "se habla de vasos y piezas tomadas ó adjudicados al primer gefe del egército aliado: se habla de cantidad de plata tomada en la casa de moneda por otro funcionario, ya á cuenta de sueldos, ya sin este pretexto" (Montúfar, *Memorias*, p. 175).

⁷⁷ Bancroft, *Central America*, III. 103-104.

⁷⁸ Haefkens, *Centraal Amerika*, pp. 275-276.

⁷⁹ Marure, *Efemérides*, p. 25.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*; Crowe, *Gospel in Central America*, p. 131.

secularize, and cut off recruits for the nunneries by prohibiting all future vows and professions by women.⁸¹ On September 7th of the same year the Federal Congress declared that religious orders would no longer be received or recognized in the land; and the various provinces of the Confederation quickly ratified the declaration.⁸²

The members of the religious orders who were not banished with the Archbishop fared variously. Those who were regarded as dangerous to the government were ordered to leave the country, and in some cases were escorted out of the land; while others departed on their own initiative.⁸³ Some preferred to doff their ecclesiastical garb and remain, engaged in secular pursuits.⁸⁴ Most of the nuns seem to have continued true to their vows, and to have pursued their cloistered lives with renewed zeal, which perhaps accounts for their being further limited in 1834 by a decree prohibiting the authorities from retaining those who refused to reside in the convents where they professed.⁸⁵

The confiscated buildings of the religious orders were put to various secular uses, generally in execution of the progressive plans of the Liberals. The house of the Dominicans in Guatemala City became a model prison, like those recently established in the United States, the cells of the friars being altered to accommodate criminals; another convent in the capital was occupied by the new Lancasterian normal school; a third was converted into a public hospital; while still others were employed as military barracks, or in connection with governmental plans for the improvements of agriculture and commerce.⁸⁶ Convent buildings in the outlying parts of the Republic were put to similar uses.⁸⁷

⁸¹ Marure, *Efemérides*, p. 25; Crowe, *Gospel in Central America*, p. 131.

⁸² Marure, *Efemérides*, p. 57, 59; Squier, *Nicaragua*, II. 409.

⁸³ Montúfar, *Memorias*, p. 176; Squier, *Nicaragua*, II. 408.

⁸⁴ Tempsky, *Mitla*, p. 372; G. W. Montgomery, *Narrative of a Journey to Guatemala, in Central America, in 1838*, p. 92.

⁸⁵ Marure, *Efemérides*, p. 57.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 62, 72, 87; Montúfar, *Memorias*, p. 176; Crowe, *Gospel in Central America*, p. 136.

⁸⁷ Squier, *Nicaragua*, I. 372.

The more immediate danger to the government having been removed by the expulsion of the Archbishop and by the acts against the regular clergy, the Liberals proceeded further to weaken the Church on its secular side by Federal decrees prohibiting the promulgation, without previous governmental consent, of papal enactments of every description, and providing that the appointment of all high Church dignitaries be made by the president of the Republic.⁸⁸ A still bolder step was taken in May, 1832, when Congress declared complete religious freedom, and promised protection to all denominations—a measure which the provincial assemblies promptly confirmed.⁸⁹

Indeed, in some cases the states anticipated or exceeded the central government in their anti-clerical legislation. Perhaps the most extreme example of this is furnished by Honduras, which decreed, in May, 1830, that secular priests might marry and their children inherit just as did the offspring of other marriages; and what makes the law of special interest is the fact that it was proposed by a bishop who had allied himself with the Liberals and sat in the provincial assembly.⁹⁰ Presumably with the object of more closely identifying the secularized friars also with the main body of the population, Honduras—later followed by Guatemala—specifically decreed that this anomalous group should come under the regular inheritance laws, and should enjoy full rights of citizenship.⁹¹ At about the time that the central government proclaimed religious freedom, most of the states struck the Church a blow on the financial side by prohibiting all payment of tithes.⁹² In 1834, Costa Rica and

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 371; Crowe, *Gospel in Central America*, pp. 131–132; Dunlop, *Central America*, p. 181.

⁸⁹ Crowe, *Gospel in Central America*, pp. 131–132. In consequence of this decree, Frederick Crowe, who was a British Baptist missionary, began his labors in Central America. He remained until religious intolerance was reëstablished through the victory of the Serviles.

⁹⁰ Marure, *Efemerides*, pp. 60–61; Karl Scherzer, *Wanderungen durch die Mittel-Amerikanischen Freistaaten*, p. 316. The law was repealed in the following year, but the part relating to inheritance was reënacted in 1833 (see Arce, *Efemerides*, pp. 60–61).

⁹¹ Marure, *Efemerides*, p. 82.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 71.

Guatemala, in the hope of eliminating one of the most powerful means of control possessed by the clergy, declared the abolition of all fête and saints' days of the Roman Church, except Sunday and five of the most sacred holidays.⁹³ The thought of weakening priestly power also prompted the provision by some of the states for cemeteries under public control;⁹⁴ and was the basis for the decree passed by Guatemala in 1837—and enacted by the Federal Congress the following year—which declared that marriage should be recognized before the law as merely a civil contract.⁹⁵

It is doubtful whether the Central American Confederation could have long survived, even if the influence of the Church could have been completely eliminated; for individual selfishness and the schism created by Delgado prevented solidarity among the Liberals; and the many members of the Servile group who were unmoved by religious interests were determined to gain the ascendancy at all odds; furthermore, with these latter was allied a strong British element—official representatives as well as private individuals—who labored incessantly to overthrow Morazán and his supporters, because of a determination displayed by these Liberals to thwart British ambitions and designs on the Isthmus.⁹⁶ As it was, Roman Catholicism proved the most direct and most inevitable cause for the downfall of the Liberals and the destruction of the Union. This was due to the fact that in its efforts to destroy the clerical menace, the government simply increased the power of the enemy. For though, by persistent effort, the Liberals had transformed the Church from a religious monopoly, supported at public expense, into a private organization—shorn of much of its wealth, and, apparently, of its most obvious means of control—which must take its chances with other religious bodies that might be established in the land; and though the most intelligent part of the

⁹³ Crowe, *Gospel in Central America*, p. 136; Montúfar, *Reseña histórica*, II. 78.

⁹⁴ Montúfar, *Reseña histórica*, II. 78.

⁹⁵ Marure, *Efemérides*, p. 93.

⁹⁶ Mary W. Williams, *Anglo-American Isthmian Diplomacy*, p. 3

population had come to hold most of its teachings in contempt and to ridicule many of its practices;⁹⁷ so firm was the grip of the priests upon the ignorant masses, that not only were the laws which were intended to liberate the humbler members of the population from clerical influence of no effect,⁹⁸ but the zeal of the masses for the Church was vastly increased, and, through the preaching of the enraged clergy, their distrust and fear of the Liberals created in them a solidarity which could be employed with disastrous effect under priestly leadership.

This power in the hands of the Church had repeatedly shown sinister possibilities through sullen opposition here and there to the innovations of financial exactions of the government; or in the form of uprisings in the provinces against measures that seemed to endanger religion; and only a fitting opportunity was needed to produce wide-spread and successful resistance. This chance came in 1837 when an epidemic of cholera scourged the land. At the time when it appeared, the Indians of the District of Mita, influenced by their priests and other ill-disposed persons, were much perturbed over the system of trial by jury—incomprehensible to them—which was being introduced. The disease spread rapidly, and the government, in the hope of somewhat alleviating the situation, dispatched the available physicians and medical students, as well, to the afflicted districts with remedies for distribution. But their ministrations were of little or no avail, and the natives died by the thousand. A frenzy of terror, which the vigilant clergy promptly used to advantage, soon seized the poor wretches. The disease, the priests intimated, was caused by the Liberals having poisoned the rivers and streams with a view to wiping out the original population and repopling the land with foreigners. In proof of this, they pointed to a recent grant of territory in Vera Paz made to a British colonization company. A cry was now raised by the

⁹⁷ . . . "all the young people above the laboring classes have, in spite of them [the priests] imbibed infidel opinions, and make no hesitation in calling the Christian revelation a ridiculous fable, and the priests, comedians and cheats" (Dunlop, *Central America*, p. 342).

⁹⁸ Dunlop, *Central America*, p. 343, and *passim*; Montúfar, *Reseña histórica*, II. 78.

frantical Indians against their supposed murderers, and against the foreign usurpers. Before the physicians could escape, some of them were seized and put to death by various methods of torture.⁹⁹

In this manner the insurrectionary movement began in the District of Mita; but it spread rapidly, gaining support not only from the ignorant masses in other parts of the country, but from the aristocratic Serviles and political and religious exiles—who now returned home—and, towards the last, from those who deserted the losing cause of the Liberals. The leader of the Mita aborigines was an illiterate mestizo youth, Rafael Carrera, who, at the outset, was merely a tool in the hands of the priests; but his power and self-importance increased as the revolt spread, and he was soon hailed as general and commander-in-chief of the motley and heterogeneous army that rallied about him. Stimulated by his military successes and encouraged by the ecclesiastics, this unkempt and ignorant stripling soon came to regard himself as a “man of destiny”, called by the Almighty to tear down the existing order in the interest of a system of some other type, to be instituted by himself.¹⁰⁰

Even before the rise of Carrera, the nation was in a bad way: the Federal government was showing serious signs of demoralization, and secession had become an epidemic among the provinces. When the insurrection broke out among the Indians, Francisco Morazán, who for two terms had served as president, headed the military forces of the Liberals and fought now here and now there as the power which had armed itself to destroy him appeared in new quarters. But the odds were on the other side. By April, 1840, Morazán's defeat was so decisive that,

⁹⁹ Marure, *Efemérides*, pp. 95-96; Crowe, *Gospel in Central America*, p. 141; Dunlop, *Central America*, pp. 192-194; Montgomery, *Narrative*, pp. 142-143.

¹⁰⁰ “They [the priests] proclaimed to the natives that he was their protecting angel Rafael, descended from heaven to take vengeance on the heretics, Liberals, and foreigners, and to restore their ancient dominion. They devised various tricks to favor the delusion, which were heralded as miracles. A letter was let down from the roof of one of the churches, in the midst of a vast congregation of Indians, which purported to come from the Virgin Mary, commissioning Carrera to lead in a general revolt against the government, and assuring him of the tangible interposition of Heaven!” (Squier, *Nicaragua*, II. 429-430.)

with a handful of loyal followers, he fled to Chile, leaving behind him the wreck of the Confederation in the hands of the Serviles. Two years later when Morazán returned, with the object of restoring the union of the provinces, he overestimated the zeal felt for this cause, was overthrown and imprisoned as a result of an insurrection produced by his financial exactions; and, on September 18, 1841, was shot by his captors. With him perished the best hope of Central America.

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